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ABSTRACT

The Vernon Non Verbal Personality Test has been developed in pilot form and standardization is now being planned. It involves the use of reproductions, famous works of art, incomplete pictures, the drawings of mental patients of known diagnosis, and picture dramas. The subject completes the test by himself in about 45 minutes after being helped with sample items. Scoring is objective and can be done by machine or use of answer form. (Author)

ED 059245

Final Report--Vernon Non-Verbal Personality Test (SRS 70-26)

The purpose of the research involving Contract No. SRS 70-26 was to develop an objective non-verbal personality test. No such test exists.

Need

At present many people who are deaf, aphasics, non-English speaking, culturally different, illiterate, psychotic, or who are otherwise linguistically handicapped are unable to take existing objective personality tests because all of these tests require reading skills. Nonobjective personality measures such as the Rorschach and Thematic Apperception Test preclude extensive ability to communicate orally, are expensive and tremendously time consuming to administer, and their interpretation is highly subjective. The only personality measures which are essentially non-verbal are the House Tree Person and Draw-A-Person tests, both of which are excessively subjective to interpret and at best can be used as gross screening devices (Chapman, L. J. and Chapman, J., 1971).

Thus, the large segment of the population noted above (who because of neurological leision, cultural deviance, or other pathology lack verbal skills) are deprived of proper psycho-diagnostic testing. This is especially unfortunate because it is these same cases who, due to their linguistic disabilities, cannot be adequately interviewed. Consequently, they may be denied appropriate vocational evaluation, psychiatric diagnosis, and other services. For example, frequently, deaf patients in mental hospitals are there due to improper diagnostic techniques, not psychiatric illness (Grinker, 1969; Vernon, 1969).

Hence the need for an objective non-verbal test of personality for use with deaf and other linguistically handicapped persons is evident.

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Methodology

The initial step in the development of the test was to arrive at some basic formats or subtests. These and their development will be described individually below.

Subtest Development

I. Famous Works of Art Subtest The basic rationale of this subtest is that gifted artists communicate their basic feelings in their paintings. A person's reaction to these paintings is an interaction of what the artist has expressed and the viewer's personality.

In developing this fundamental premise into test items it was necessary to carefully study the lives and personality structures of famous artists and to then carefully match their paintings with various periods in their lives. For example, painters such as Van Gogh, Pollack, and Munch had had psychiatric treatment which was fairly well documented. Thus, their suicidal tendencies, psychiatric episodes, or problems of sexual conflict could be associated with particular periods of their paintings. In the case of artists who did not have formal psychiatric histories, biographies and autobiographies were carefully studied for evidence on personality dynamics and related paintings. From this extensive research a paper, "Art, Madness, and Human Interaction" was developed which is now in press with the College Art Journal.

Once the research was completed reproductions of the paintings were carefully grouped into sets of five. These groupings are such that the person taking the test is offered; 1) a maximum variety of personality structures in the artists who painted the pictures, 2) paintings which reflect a variety of ideas, and 3) paintings ex-

pressing a full range of affective qualities.

Thus, by having a person select from sets of five famous paintings carefully matched in terms of what is known about the psychodynamics of the artist and the qualities in the painting, the person's selections will reveal his own affective qualities. These selections are manifestations of his own psychodynamics. This entire theory is stated more clearly in the paper entitled "Art, Madness, and Human Interaction."

II Ambiguous Picture Matching Subtest This part of the total test involved ambiguous pictures or designs, each of which was created to "pull for" certain themes such as aggression or sexuality. The rationale was that if a person looks at an ambiguous stimulus he tends to project his own thoughts and feelings into it.

The person taking the test first looked at the ambiguous, sometimes Rorschach-like design, and was then given four non-ambiguous pictures related to each design. These pictures dealt with the possible themes or feelings the ambiguous designs might arouse. The one selected would then reflect the person's dynamics.

Extensive time, experimentation, and money went into the development of this subtest. However, it required artistic skills and time investments far beyond the budget for the contract and had to be dropped. It remains a viable prototype for development when resources permit.

III Incomplete Picture Subtest This section consists of a series of separate pictures, each of which has an important part missing and an empty space left for this part. The person taking the test has a choice of four pieces, each of which fits the space where a missing

part belongs. For example, in one test item there is a choice of four kinds of clothing. By choosing a picture showing conventional clothing, a uniform, or hippie attire, the person taking the test projects something about his own life style and/or attitude toward authority. Similarly in another item the positioning of the hands conveys different affects such as anger, defeat, passiveness, or femininity. By his selection of one of these, the subject projects his own feelings and dynamics.

The Incomplete Picture Subtest involves basic projective testing theory but more specifically it utilizes the rationale underlying human figure drawing interpretations. However, its scoring is objective.

IV Pathological Drawing Subtest The human figure drawings of a large number of patients representing almost every diagnostic category of mental illness were obtained from the files of my own private practice, those of St. Elizabeths Hospital, and other facilities. These drawings were then grouped into sets of five. For example, in a given set there might be one drawing each of a homicidal patient, a schizophrenic, an arsonist, a manic depressive, and a rapist.

The rationale underlying the Pathological Drawing Subtest is that in their drawings the patients have reflected in part their psychopathology, be it schizophrenic, arson, etc. In turn, the person taking the test will react differentially to these pathological drawings in terms of his own problems.

V Drama Picture Subtest The rationale underlying this subtest is that if sequences of three to five pictures telling part of a story are presented along with choices of pictures to complete the story

the way a person completes the story will reflect basic aspects of his personality. For example, a picture sequence might show a man running down the street and then meeting a policeman. To complete the sequence there would be a choice of pictures--one showing the policeman helping the man, another showing him arresting the man, another showing him chasing the man, etc. The person taking the test, by his selection of endings for a series of such picture stories, would reveal his attitudes toward authority.

Problems in Subtest Development

There were some Herculean problems to overcome in the subtest development, many of which involved technical aspects of color photography, graphic reproduction, selection of materials, artwork, etc. On a large budget these could have been more easily handled, but this failure to ask for more funds was my own fault. The problems encountered will be discussed in brief.

First, it is tremendously difficult and expensive to reproduce works of art which are in color photographically. It was necessary to try numerous metropolitan photographers before getting one capable enough to do this intricate work up to the high standards required. When such a craftsman was finally located the cost was so prohibitive that it would have been possible to produce only a few test items. Therefore, it was decided to use quality postcard reproductions from art museums instead. This drastically reduced the available selection of art works and necessitated redoing major aspects of the research that had resulted in the original carefully developed picture groupings of the Famous Works of Art Subtest.

The Incomplete Picture Subtest had to be extensively researched first in order to arrive at the psychological content of the items. These ideas then had to be represented in drawings in a close cooperative endeaver be-

tween myself and the artist. It was next necessary to photograph the drawings, mount them on a firm, stiff paper-like substance thick enough to be durable. This then had to be glazed in order that handling would not soil the items. It was also necessary to make certain that the choices to complete the missing part of the picture fitted correctly into the available space in the sense that jigsaw puzzles fit together.

Large graphic arts and puzzle manufacturing companies were not interested in developing these prototype items except at prohibitive prices. Thus, it was necessary to do much of this work painstakingly by hand with local craftsmen.

The Pathological Drawing Subtest involved extensive photography and some problems of proper mounting and glazing of surfaces to assure durability. However, these were not major difficulties.

The Drama Picture Subtest is severely limited in terms of the number of items involved due to budgetary restrictions on artist fees. However, the subtest presented no major technical difficulties not already solved in the Pathological Drawing Subtest. As indicated earlier the Ambiguous Picture Subtest was dropped in favor of the Pathological Drawing Subtest due to the costs of artists' services.

In sum, the problems have been primarily technical and financial. The extensive background research and occasional blind alleys that characterize most original research have been present.

Standardization and Pilot Population

The intent of this research was to create a prototype objective nonverbal personality test which could then be standardized.. It is obviously impossible to standardize such a test without thousands of subjects, a sizeable number of which represent each of the major mental illness categories, plus normal persons from different ethnic groups, sexes, socio-

economic statuses, etc. However, it was necessary as the test was developed subtest by subtest to field test each item in order to see if it differentiated among subjects. Four major pilot populations were used for this work: the mentally ill deaf patients at St. Elizabeth's Hospital; deaf youth in the Maryland School for the Deaf; a range of teen-age youths from the local school program for exceptional children who represented handicaps including aphasia, cultural deprivation, and autism; and deaf professional persons participating in the National Association of the Deaf Psycholinguistics Institute held at Western Maryland College this summer.

It was originally intended that the full test be developed with no field testing and that it then be administered to 100 subjects. As the research progressed it became obvious that this approach would be grossly inefficient. Instead, as individual subtests were developed, each containing many more items than were eventually used, these subtests were administered to segments of the pilot population. Their responses were carefully noted and followed up by an extensive inquiry period during which each subject was asked in detail about his response to each item. All of the inquiry was done by the principal investigator. In order to get at the "tester" variable, administration was divided between myself, a trained member of the St. Elizabeth's Hospital Staff, and a teacher-psychologist at the Maryland School for the Deaf. All tests which I did not administer I observed in full.

Using this general approach it was possible to eliminate or restructure items which were excessively threatening to patients psychologically, to identify items to which subjects of different diagnostic category did not respond differentially, and to get a general clinical interpretation of the tests.

The process was extremely time consuming. The inquiry period would

often last two to three hours after the actual testing. Then revision, addition, and deletion of items was necessary, followed by administration to other subjects of the resulting form of the subtest.

The cost and time involved in this work alone far exceeded that budgeted in the 100 pilot sample "standardization" requested in the grant. It was therefore necessary to obtain a two month time extension and complete much of this research evenings and weekends.

Following the extensive individual piloting of each subtest separately item by item and the final selection of test items based primarily on clinical analysis and in part on some computerized efforts at item analysis (which were of limited value to us due to our having only 135 total cases), the full test was given to all deaf patients at St. Elizabeth's Hospital. The results of all of this work are summarized subtest by subtest in narration form below.

Fine Arts Subtest Fifty sets of five paintings each were finally decided upon. These proved to be an excellent diagnostic tool having high appeal to all subjects. Even very psychotic withdrawn patients were attracted by the items. Their response in several instances was to strongly identify with certain of the persons in the pictures and fantasize as though they were these people. Pictures involving themes of hostility and sexuality were especially effective.

Pathological Drawings Subtest Reactions to the drawings of other patients was often intense and on occasion threatening and upsetting. They were also highly revealing and differentiating. An effort was made to eliminate items of too much emotional charge without taking from this subtest its excellent diagnostic potential. Using these criteria, 40 groupings of five items each were retained.

Picture Drama Subtest Piloting of this subtest yielded the most disappointing results. The quality of the artistic portrayal of many of the stories was poor and unduly ambiguous. Thus, it was necessary to discard 80% of these items because subjects' reactions in taking them revealed they were not useful in discriminating between people on personality variables. Seven of the Picture Dramas were salvaged, but a total of 30 to 50 of these are needed.

Picture Completion Subtest This subtest proved to be the most fun for subjects and examiners. It was done quickly while arousing no feelings of anxiety, yet it was of great diagnostic value. Although it was the last subtest administered in the piloting, it should be given first in the final standardization.

Future Plans

The original intent of the research has been completed in that a prototype objective non-verbal personality test has been developed. The Picture Story subtest should have some additional items. An application for funding this ($2,500) has been submitted to Western Maryland College. However, as it now stands the test fills a tremendous need and is highly deserving of standardization. Not only does its value generalize beyond the deaf population to all persons with linguistic difficulties, but as an easy to administer, quick, objective, non-verbal test of personality it will have value and appeal to all psychodiagnosticians and the total population.

To ready the test for final distribution, two major steps remain. One is to standardize it. In brief this will be done as was done with the MMPI; i.e., it will be administered to a representative sample of the general or "normal" population and then to samples of patients with various types of mental disorder. Cluster and item analyses will yield profiles

of "normals" and of patients with schizophrenia, homocidal tendencies, depression, etc. These data will comprise the norms of the test.

The second major step is to reproduce all the items into a booklet form. This will greatly reduce eventual administrative costs and time and permit group administration and machine scoring if desired.

Discussion with the contract office, Dr. Elizabeth Krumm, and other officials of SRS will be conducted to determine if this further work is best done under contract or through a grant application.

Summary

A creative synthesis of existing personality assessment theory and original work using fine art has been combined to produce a prototype objective non-verbal personality test usable with not only deaf and linguistically impaired persons but the general population as well. Furthermore, in final form it will be inexpensive, self-administering in most cases, and machine scored.

The demand and need for such a test is almost universal to rehabilitation, hospital and industrial settings.